

## Message Text

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12

ACTION EA-10

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USIA-06 AID-05 /060 W

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R 060640Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9233

INFO CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

USSAG NKP THAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 2278

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, CB

SUBJ: KHMER NAVAL LOSSES, JANUARY 1 - FEBRUARY 6, 1975.

1. THE HEAVY FIGHTING AROUND PHNOM PENH DURING MUCH OF JANUARY, AND THE HEAVY LOSSES SUSTAINED BY BOTH SIDES THERE, TENDED FOR A TIME TO OBSCURE THE VITAL EFFORT OF THE SMALL, BUT HITHERTO EFFECTIVE KHMER NAVY (MNK). MNK IS COMPOSED OF BOTH A RIVERINE NAVAL FORCE AND A NAVAL INFANTRY ELEMENT (BFMS). THERE IS ALSO A "BLUE WATER" COMPONENT OF THE CAMBODIAN SEACOAST.

2. CONVOY SECURITY ON THE LOWER MEKONG IN THE PAST HAD BEEN ASSURED, NOT ONLY BY COORDINATED AIR COVER AND MNK SUPPORT ON THE RIVER, BUT ALSO BY THE PRESENCE OF A NUMBER OF SMALL BFM OUTPOSTS AT KEY POINTS ON BOTH BANKS. THESE OUTPOSTS WERE A PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF THE ENEMY BEGINNING ON JANUARY 1, AN ALL BUT TWO MNK POSITIONS WERE OVERRUN DURING JANUARY, WITH FAIRLY HIGH CASUALTIES TAKEN BY THE BFMS. A NUMBER OF THESE POSITIONS, BUT NOT ALL, HAVE SINCE BEEN REOCCUPIED BY FANK FORCES.

3. MEANWHILE, THE MNK RIVER CRAFT WERE BUSIER THAN EVER ESCORTING CONVOYS TO AND FROM THE IMPORTANT ENCLAVE OF NEAK LUONG, ON THE EAST BANK HALFWAY BETWEEN PHNOM PENH AND THE BORDER. MNK CRAFT AND CREWS SUS-  
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TAINED CONSTANT AND HEAVY ATTACKS BY FIRE FROM THE

BANKS DURING THESE RUNS, PRIOR TO THE RESUMPTION OF THE EFFORT TO PUSH MAJOR CONVOYS UP FROM THE VIETNAM BORDER. TO DATE THERE HAVE BEEN FOUR OF THESE MAJOR CONVOYS ATTEMPTED UPSTREAM AND TWO DOWNSTREAM, WITH VARYING DEGREES OF SUCCESS, AS REPORTED ELSEWHERE, BUT ALL SUBJECT TO HEAVY ENEMY ATTACKS BY FIRE AND, MORE RECENTLY, TO ENEMY MINES.

4. CLEARLY, MNK IS INDISPENSABLE TO THE SOLUTION OF THE MEKONG CONVOY PROBLEM. BUT THE KHMER NAVY HAS BEEN PAYING A HEAVY PRICE FOR ITS EFFORTS ON THE RIVER. FOR THE JANUARY 1 - FEBRUARY 6 PERIOD, IT HAS TOTALLY LOST TEN RIVER CRAFT (3 RIVER PATROL BOATS, 2 ARMORED TROOP CARRIERS, 4 MEDIUM ARMED LANDING CRAFT, AND 1 MONITOR -- A CONVERSION OF A RIVER CRAFT CARRYING A 105 MM HOWITZER, AS A SORT OF FLOATING GUN PLATFORM). EIGHT ADDITIONAL RIVER PATROL BOATS ARE OUT OF COMMISSION AS A RESULT OF SERIOUS HULL DAMAGE. THE REMAINING INVENTORY COMES TO 146 COMBAT CRAFT, BOTH ON THE RIVER AND FOR COASTAL DEFENSE IN THE GULF OF THAILAND.

5. PERSONNEL LOSSES FOR THE SAME PERIOD, OB BOTH MNK AND BFM PERSONNEL, HAVE BEEN: 276 KILLED 126 MISSING, AND 649 WOUNDED, A TOTAL OF 1,051 CASUALTIES IN A FORCE THAT NEVER TOTALLED MORE THAN 15,000 INCLUDING EVERY KIND OF SUPPORT, HEADQUARTERS, MAINTENANCE PERSONNEL, AND THE LIKE.

6. OBVIOUSLY, EQUIPMENT LOSSES ARE NOT GOING TO BE MADE UP IN ANY SIGNIFICANT QUANTITY, GIVEN PRESENT FUNDING CONSTRAINTS. AN EVEN MORE SIGNIFICANT CONCERN FOR THE NEAR FUTURE IS A DEGRADATION OF OPERATIVE CAPABILITY DUE TO SHEER EQUIPMENT FATIGUE, WHICH LIMITS EFFECTIVE USE OF THE REMAINING CRAFT TO 2/3 TO 3/4 OF THE 146 AT A GIVEN TIME. THE CONTINUING ATTRITION OF MNK AS AN EFFECTIVE FORCE IS A FACTOR WHICH MUST BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN ASSESSING THE OVERALL COMBAT CAPABILITY OF THE KHMER ARMED FORCES.  
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